



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION HONORS
CONGRESSMAN JOHN DINGELL,
ADDS TO THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM,
APPROVES WETLANDS CONSERVATION GRANTS

Congressman John D. Dingell of Michigan was honored today by the Cabinet-level Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for 25 years of distinguished service on the Commission, which represents the oldest, most prestigious wildlife conservation body in the Federal government.

"Congressman Dingell's commitment to wildlife conservation is matched only by his determination to see that full value be received for every dollar expended from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund," said Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, the Commission Chairman. "His straightforward style, piercing questions, and knowledge of waterfowl have ensured that every refuge acquisition and wetland project was fully justified and of critical importance."

"It is a labor of love for me to have served on the Commission for the past 25 years," said Representative Dingell. "We have worked together to establish over 30 wildlife refuges, creating over 600,000 acres of habitat for countless migratory birds and other wildlife. The Commission has approved over 275 public and private sector joint venture projects under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, conserving over 1 million acres of wetlands in North America."

"In the Lower Great Lakes region alone, over 20,000 acres are lost or degraded annually due to agricultural expansion and other development. Under the Commission's work, more than 10,000 acres will be protected and enhanced, benefitting waterfowl, endangered species, migratory birds, and fish."

"There is no doubt that the Commission's work will continue to be a wise investment in the future of our natural resources," he said.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie hailed Congressman Dingell as a "champion of the wild things and wild places we hold dear. His career has added lustre to the conservation legacy of his father, making the Dingell name virtually synonymous with fish and wildlife conservation."

Also a Congressman, Dingell's father sponsored a number of landmark conservation measures such as the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, known as the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Program, which will provide \$175 million this year to state fish and wildlife agencies from excise taxes on fishing equipment.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission marks its 65th anniversary this year. It was established in 1929, during the Depression and a severe drought, to provide breeding, migrating, and wintering habitat for then plummeting waterfowl populations. Funds for refuge acquisitions come from the sale of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (Federal Duck Stamp), presently \$15, which must be carried by all waterfowl hunters 16 years and older. Funds for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund come from appropriations and interest on other wildlife-related accounts.

In other business today, the Commission established another new refuge by approving acquisition of 1,617 acres for the Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana, added 13,354 acres to 10 other refuges, renewed the lease for a another existing refuge, and awarded grants of \$7.6 million under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act for 16 wetland projects in Mexico and the United States, including a \$600 grant to the Boy Scouts of America in response to a proposal submitted by a 16-year-old Eagle Scout in Illinois.

The Federal grants were matched by partnership funds totaling \$15,455,485. The Act supports the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other wetland conservation projects in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. Since its inception in 1989, over \$105 million in Federal funds have been matched by \$202 million from partnerships to finance 276 wetlands conservation projects in 36 states.

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell of Maine and Senator John Chafee of Rhode Island recently introduced S.1857 which would extend the measure for another 5 years and increase the amount authorized for appropriation.

Other members of the Commission include Senator David Pryor of Arkansas, Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi, Representative Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy, and Administrator Carol Browner of the Environmental Protection Agency.

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A summary listing of refuge additions and grants acted upon during the Commission meeting follows.

Refuge Additions:

California -- Butte Sink Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the Central Valley northwest of Sacramento -- conservation easement on 634 acres of critical wintering habitat for wood ducks and the endangered Aleutian Canada goose;

Delevan National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), northwest of Sacramento -- 163 acres of a major wintering area for 500,000 ducks and 200,000 geese;

Grasslands WMA, near Los Banos -- 417 acres of important wintering habitat for a variety of migratory birds;

North Central Valley WMA, encompassing 11 counties -- easement on 460 acres to protect, restore, and maintain wetlands for waterfowl.

Louisiana -- Grand Cote NWR, near Alexandria -- boundary approval of 12,800 acres; also approvals to acquire 1,617 acres plus a 50-year lease on another 80 acres to protect and enhance bottomland hardwood forests and swamps.

Maryland -- Blackwater NWR, near Cambridge -- add 503 acres of important waterfowl nesting and wintering habitat.

Missouri -- Swan Lake NWR, 65 miles northeast of Kansas City -- 125 acres of habitat used by one of the largest wintering concentrations of geese in North America.

Mississippi -- St. Catherine Creek NWR, near Natchez -- boundary expansion of 12,183 acres and acquisition of 10,214 acres of bottomland hardwood forests and swamps for migrating and wintering waterfowl.

Montana -- Halfbreed Lake NWR, 40 miles northwest of Billings -- 10-year lease renewal on 640 acres of native shortgrass prairie that provide nesting habitat for migratory birds.

New Jersey -- Cape May NWR, 30 miles southwest of Atlantic City -- 55 acres of marsh, shoreline, wooded swamp, and forest uplands for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, woodcock and neotropical birds; Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, 6 miles north of Atlantic City -- 69 acres of tidal marsh and red maple swamp habitat for black ducks and shorebirds.

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Utah -- Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, 55 miles north of Salt Lake City -- 414 acres of breeding and migration habitat used by 31 species of waterfowl.

All of the refuge acquisitions contribute to the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants-United States:

California -- Merced NWR \$264,500 to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore and enhance 2,180 acres;

Stone Lakes NWR \$1,127,620 to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire, restore, and improve 762 acres.

Illinois -- Red's Landing \$150,000 to Illinois Department of Conservation to restore 641 acres;

J. L. Markham Moist Soil Management \$600 to Boy Scouts of America, Troop 33, Eldorado, to establish a moist soil plant community within a 3-acre wetland basin. The proposal was submitted by Eagle Scout Jason N. Spanel of Eldorado to develop a unique wetland in a retention basin left from construction of a shopping center. His project is supported by a variety of partners, ranging from the Wal-Mart Foundation and Izaak Walton League of America to the Illinois Youth Corrections Center and Westvaco Corporation, which have contributed cash and in-kind services.

Iowa -- Lost Island-Trumbull Lake Watershed \$450,000 to Iowa Department of Natural Resources to acquire and restore 750 acres.

New Jersey -- Maurice River \$1,075,000 to New Jersey Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife to acquire 3,814 acres in one of the hemisphere's most important shorebird concentration areas; The Nature Conservancy will hold title to 1,000 acres.

North Dakota -- Northern Coteau Wetland \$425,800 to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire 7,470 acres and restore and enhance an additional 10,275 acres in a multi-year, 6 county effort.

South Carolina -- ACE Basin NWR \$720,000 to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire and enhance 1,828 acres.

Texas -- Mad Island Marsh \$1,100,000 to The Nature Conservancy of Texas to acquire 3,900 acres and restore an additional 1,914 acres in a multi-year project.

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Washington -- North Puget Sound First Step \$1,137,000 to Washington Department of Wildlife to acquire and restore 1,354 acres in the Skagit Delta from near Stanwood, Washington, to the Canadian border.

Wisconsin -- Wisconsin Glacial Habitat \$500,000 to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to acquire 2,638 acres and restore and enhance 2,098 acres in four counties.

Wetlands Restoration on Private Lands in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi -- \$363,100 to Ducks Unlimited to restore and enhance 22,250 acres of historic waterfowl habitat.

Mexico:

Baja California --\$73,270 (match \$73,270) to produce topographic maps and remotely sensed images of the four major coastal wetland complexes which are essential for wildlife inventories, planning reserves, delineating endangered species habitat and other conservation projects.

Chihuahua -- \$55,750 (match \$88,260) to establish a management plan for the Laguna de Babicora wetland ecosystem that will protect regional and hemispheric biodiversity of wetland associated wildlife, maintain ecological processes, and improve local socio-economic conditions.

Yucatan -- \$154,837 (match \$380,312) to design, establish, and maintain environmental monitoring and database systems to provide the basis for integration of conservation management with sustainable economic development.

Sonora -- \$62,262 (match \$62,300) to develop a management plan for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and resource conservation with local community participation and a schematic structure of an administration council.